DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 648 EA 024 092

AUTHOR Randall, Ruth E.
TITLE The Principal's New Role in Implementing Choice.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (San Francisco, CA, February 14-18, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; *Boards of Education; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Dissemination; Nontraditional Education; *Parent Participation; *Principals; *Program Implementation; *School Choice

ABSTRACT

The role of the principal in implementing school choice policy is examined in this paper. Choice policy is viewed as a triad composed of three points--policy, consumer information, and diversity of the learning environment. Guidelines are offered for principals to help parents make school choice decisions, and several helpful booklets are identified. Factors in parental choice include understanding child development, disseminating information, and considering the costs of providing information. Examples of different learning environments in Minnesota are described. A conclusion is that choice is a powerful change agent, and principals who accept their new role in implementing it will be leaders in effecting change. (20 references) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Randall
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED347648

The Principal's New Role in Implementing Choice

Dr. Ruth E. Randall, Professor
Department of Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Former Commissioner of Education, State of Minnesota
Author of School Choice: Issues and Answers

Paper presented to National Association
of Secondary School Principals,
San Francisco, February 14-18, 1992

EA 024092

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

All us of who are educators are delighted that the interest in education restructuring continues unabated. Changes in teaching and learning are helped by the fact that we have the involvement of so many people who are not in education. Governors, legislators, foundations, business and industry, the media, Congress and the President of the United States, all want to help with the reform and restructuring of education.

Our educational system was great for the industrial age. We did a fine job of educating people to work in industry. Students learned a set of facts and procedures, went off to work, and made the United States the greatest industrial country in the world. But we're in a different age now, the information age, and we have to make changes.

Incentives and Opportunities

Incentives and opportunities will bring change more quickly than mandates and regulations. The change will be longer lasting. Providing incentives for improvements in schools and school districts is the basic purpose of choice.

Choice gives parents the right to select the schools which their children will attend. Because choice substantially changes the education paradigm, the system is finding it must be responsive to parents and students, the consumers. As public education becomes more in tune with its customers, it will find that its role and structure will also need to change. It is this type of change which will have real impact on a broad scale. Because parents have choice, schools will more and more need to address what types of programs are needed. The "one size school fits all" will never work in the new education paradigm. Better information about the objectives of different

learning models will be provided so that parents can make informed choices (Wedl, 1990).

Choice will vitalize the school and open up the reservoirs of talent represented by the teachers. The possibility of students leaving gives teachers greater leverage in getting districts to approve the improvements teachers want to make.

The powerful structure of public education will bend. The basic system of education will change. Success for all learners will become a reality.

New Role for Principals

The role of the principal changes in the implementation of choice policy. The welcoming and orientation of students new to the school is crucial if these children and young people are to feel a sense of warmth and caring on the part of administrators, faculty, and staff. Their progress in academic work will depend, in part, on how they feel about their teachers and other staff (R. Clymer, personal communication, February 8, 1990).

The principal must also take the lead in helping students who choose another school to know that their action is acceptable. They should be able to leave knowing they will be welcomed back if they make that decision at a later time (R. Clymer, personal communication, February 8, 1990).

The principal must work with the teachers and superintendent in determining how many spaces are available for incoming students. Student/teacher ratio and class size will both be factors in decision-making. Other criteria may include amount of textbooks, instructional materials, lab spaces, desks, and support staff needed for additional students.

The principal will need to plan both one-way and two-way communication to parents, as well as counseling assistance for students choosing to come to the

school and those choosing to leave the school (L. Schwartz, personal communication, February 8, 1990).

In the high school the principal may have to deal with eligibility of students for athletics and performing arts. If coaches and directors have promoted and advised community members in feeder programs there is potential conflict between coaches and parents of incoming and resident students. The principal will have to serve as mediator.

Principals will want to work with counselors and teachers who work in advisor/advisee programs in helping incoming students register for classes. Since students will probably not be physically present in the building at the time other students register for classes and cocurricular activities a time to do so will need to be arranged. Counselors or advisors will have to be available to students. Care will need to be taken to assure that students meet all requirements for graduation as well as register for courses which are prerequisite for others wanted by the student. If there is a scope and sequence of courses, students should be appraised of that fact. Student registration guides, handbooks, and policy manuals should be made available to students and their parents (R. Clymer, personal communication, February 8, 1990).

Efforts to help students socialize and become acclimated to the new school and student body will be necessary after the initial welcome and orientation. If students return to the school after having attended elsewhere the principal will want to make certain that they are once again affirmed as valuable members of the school community. The principal will no doubt have to work with both students and faculty to assure that there is mutual appreciation. Since the principal is expected to lead in establishing and maintaining school climate it is very easy to use the "We're #1" theme. When students choose to

reenter the school after leaving for a semester or a year it may seem that since they forsook the "Number 1 School" they no longer are as acceptable as other students. The principal needs to espouse the value that all human beings have worth and dignity and it is not students' actions of choosing or not choosing a school that makes them worthy (L. Schwartz, personal communication, February 8, 1990).

The principal's role in working with teachers, parents, and students in creating a diverse school is especially exciting. In assessing the needs and desires of the students, parents, and community; in determining a common purpose; in developing a shared vision, and in designing programs to fit the vision the principal has opportunity to understand and use collaborative skills of group dynamics, conflict management, conflict resolution, negotiation, and mediation.

A diversity of learning environments from which students can choose is absolutely necessary if choice is to meet its promise. Schools cannot all be alike.

A July 11, 1988 New York Times article by Edward B. Fiske points out the need for different kinds of schools.

"Betting that variety and a bit of competition will make for better schools, a growing number of districts around the country are letting parents pick the public school their children will attend."

"The push toward more choice, which began as a way to achieve racial balance in individual schools, has expanded into a broad educational movement embraced by an unusual coalition of liberals and conservatives" (p. A1).

Local Boards of Education

Members of local boards of education have new roles as they respond to legislation on educational choice. After the law is passed and there is state policy on choice, it is the responsibility of the local board of education to set policy for implementation. The first task of the board is to set expectations in the district for positive attitudes by superintendents, principals, counselors, teachers, and support staff about the implementation of choice. The demeanor of board members, superintendents, principals, and of the total staff, will make a difference in how parents and students view the options given them by law. Policies which provide for welcoming and orienting students and parents new to the district should be set. When implemented by the superintendent and principals, the board members should participate in welcoming and orientation events if at all possible (Randall, 1990b).

For students choosing to remain in their school and district, board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers may wish to affirm them in an appropriate manner. At the same time, board and staff must be careful not to denigrate students who have chosen another school or those who have chosen to come into the district. Students and parents should feel and understand that educators' strongest desire is to know that every child is getting an education best suited to him or her, whether it is in one district or another (Randall, 1990b).

A story about Albert H. Quie, A Minnesota Congressman for 22 years and Governor for four years, is significant--and poignant--as the event occurred 50 years before the analysis was made about school boards and children.

"Quie said that when he was in early school he was not doing very well, and his father took him out and he went to another district. A teacher there was interested in his problem. But for that teacher's help, he said he would

never have been successful in school or later. 'I know it's tough on school boards to lose kids,' he said, 'but it is good for the kids" (Kolderie, 1986).

Guidelines for Implementation

The legislature may include guidelines for implementation in the law. For instance, in Minnesota the legislature indicated that desegregation must continue and that districts must have the necessary space to accept students. They also set timelines for parental decision making and district response. They allocated dollars for transportation for low-income parents. They specified that districts must counsel parents prior to parental decision making as well as provide information to them (Randall, 1990b).

Whether or not the legislature in any state sets specific implementation criteria, the local board of education and administrators will have to deal with how to make choice programs work. If we think of the policy on choice as being one point of a triad, then the other two points would surely be consumer information and diversity of learning environment (Randall, 1990b).

Consumer Information

In any area where citizens have choice, they have information about choices. It may be in choosing a new home, health care provider, entertainment, or where to shop for groceries. Consumer information is necessary for parents and students when choosing a school. Local board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers have to decide on the type and amount of information that will be provided (Randall, 1989b).

Obviously, people will want to know about the grades served, hours of operation, name of principal or contact person, total enrollment, class size, number of teachers, curriculum, additional programs, and services provided. In the Twin Cities of Minnesota a local nonprofit organization, the Citizens

League, published The School Book: A Comprehensive Guide to Elementary Schools in the Twin Cities, 1990-91, as a service to parents and students in the schools (The School Book, 1990). Information was given for each elementary school about the following:

1. accreditation
2. curriculum subject matter specialty
3. teaching methods
4. nearest metropolitan transit stop
5. building and facilities
    - year built
    - year remodeled
    - air conditioning
    - laboratories
    - special rooms
6. extra-curricular programs
7. equipment/technology
8. grading system
9. parent communication
    - parent organizations
    - conferences
    - report cards
    - newsletter
    - handbook
10. services
    - AM latchkey
    - PM latchkey
    - breakfast
    - attempt to honor parent choice of teacher

Each elementary school also has a 150-word statement about its mission or intentions for the next three years.

The publication (The School Book, 1990) encourages parents to think about "what you already know about your child and yourself." For instance, the parents should "think about what your child likes to do and how your child likes to learn." Parents are reminded that their values and feelings will help determine the decisions they make. They are encouraged to visit schools to see if they are the ones they might choose for their children. The Citizens League (The School Book, 1990) suggests parents look for the following things when visiting an elementary school:

1. The classrooms are rich with materials for children.
2. Materials and equipment are within children's reach and appear to be in frequent use.
3. All children are expected to learn.
4. The school staff respects childhood and recognizes the dignity of children and learners.
5. Classroom activities are organized to respect the differences among children.
6. The school is a happy and comfortable place for learning and visiting.
7. The school respects the skills of teachers and encourages them to learn and to grow.
8. The school encourages children to learn about and respect differences in children's abilities, styles, and cultures.
9. The school is a place where my child could learn and grow.
10. The school staff values parents.
11. The school staff values other people and institutions within the community.
12. The principal is important to the climate and success of the school.

13. Teachers and administrators recognize their responsibility to know what the children are learning.

14. The school appears to be true to the words of its own mission and philosophy (The School Book, 1990).

Principals might add additional items for parents to see when they come to visit.

Another booklet published in May 1989 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, lists four steps in choosing a school (Weston, Nathan, & Raywid, 1989). They are:

Step 1: thinking about your child and your family;

Step 2: collecting information on available schools;

Step 3: visiting a school; and

Step 4: getting your child into the school you choose.

A section on "what you can do if there are no suitable schools for your child" includes information on home schooling, early college for a teenager, and working to change the system (Weston, Nathan, & Raywid, 1989).

Other publications which are available to parents include the following:

Real Choices for Parents and Children: The Nebraska Options Enrollment Program for Public Schools, published by the Nebraska Department of Education (Nebraska Department, 1990);

How to Select a School for Your Child: A Family Guide, published by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Department, 1988);

Those Great Minnesota Schools: Educational Options, published by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Department, 1989);

Choice! It's Your Move!, published by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Department, 1987);

Parent Power: Seeking the Best Education for Your Child, published by WCCO TV, Minneapolis, MN (WCCO TV, 1990); and

Inscripcion en encuelas de distrito programme de opciones (inscripcion abierta), published by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Department, 1990).

Growth and Development of Children

Board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers might also want to help parents better understand the growth and development of their children so they can choose a school which best fits their child. When children are 17 or 18 years old, they and their parents spend a great deal of time and effort in choosing the "right" college or university. Should it be public or private, large or small, situated in a large city or small town, specializing in the arts or sciences, notable for athletics or fine arts, renowned for particular academic programs or prominent professors, or known for the special counseling and attention given a student? The growth and development of a student at age 17 or 18 is seriously considered in making a choice of a college or university. Shouldn't the same be true when choosing a school for a child at age five or any other age (Randall, 1990a)?

Educators who make it possible for all parents to better understand the growth and development of their children, at age five and in the succeeding years, will provide a great service for they will be helping people become better parents. Educators will become more knowledgeable, too, as they learn more about how to inform parents of the needs of children at certain ages, how they mature, how their individual talents and abilities can be recognized, and how those talents can be nurtured (Randall, 1990a).

Dissemination of Information

Dissemination of information is also a responsibility of the board of education, superintendents, principals, and teachers. Already discussed is the work of The Citizens League of Minnesota, a non-profit organization, in publishing The School Book: A Comprehensive Guide to Elementary Schools in the Twin Cities, 1990-91. Beth Maulik publishes an annual periodical, The Schoolhouse, (Gendler, 1988) a for-profit magazine which provides information about elementary and secondary schools, both public and private. Ms. Maulik gives data on over 40 criteria for each school, provided by that institution. The Schoolhouse (Gendler, 1988) has been in production for many years. It was widely used by realtors and others prior to any public policy on educational choice.

Boards might choose to disseminate information in a number of ways. In South Saint Paul, Minnesota, a commercial quality booklet, Message to Our Family and Friends, gives extensive information about the South Saint Paul school system and was paid for by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in that city (South St. Paul, 1989).

A Los Angeles Times January 13, 1989, front page story by Bob Secter told about a marketing technique used by Superintendent Dave Metzen of South Saint Paul, Minnesota.

"The latest school catalogue to hit town is as slick as a sales brochure and boastful as a college recruiting pamphlet, promising a rich and stimulating blend of academic and extracurricular choices--day care, international studies programs, vocational training."

"The publisher? The local public schools, kindergarten through high school. That is no misprint. The *public* schools."

"Crammed with crafty slogans and eye-catching snapshots of playful and studious youngsters, officials here see the catalogue as a vital sales tool in a brave, uncertain new world of educational competition as Minnesota schools prepared to view for students under a unique statewide open enrollment scheme."

"'I have absolutely no problem saying we market our school district,' said Dave Metzen, the school superintendent in this blue-collar suburb just south of the state capital. 'We're in a service business' . . ." (p. 1).

"'A little competition doesn't hurt,' said Metzen, the South Saint Paul superintendent. 'If you go to a doctor or get your car fixed, you insist on quality service. Why should we be any different'" (p. 30)?

Schools might publish their own brochures or devote an issue of their own newspaper to providing the kind of data needed and wanted by parents. One-way communication may be adequate for some parents; others may need two-way communication. In low-income areas of a school district, communication may be through individuals representing ministerial alliances or churches, community health services, human services staff, or other agencies which serve the parents and students who live there. Actually, two-way communication is desirable for all students regardless of economic status (Randall, 1990a).

Costs of Providing Information

Costs of providing information may increase but not in total, that is, the newspapers, brochures, handouts which have been in use can be modified to include data needed for decision making by parents. Announcements and other information can be given at Parent Teacher Association and other parent organization meetings, at booster club events, and the like. In other words, the communication system which is in place at a school or district can be modified to provide a lot of information to help parents in making decisions. New publications or new meetings with district citizens and people from other

districts may entail some cost; service organizations in a town, city, or county may be willing to underwrite such costs (Randall, 1990b).

The state department of education may be the institution which becomes responsible for the dissemination of information about all schools. Since education is the responsibility of the state and since more and more legislatures or the courts are finding state funding systems inequitable, it may be that the state should take the responsibility for providing data to parents about the schools to provide equity of access (Randall, 1990b).

The state could also provide help to parents in understanding the growth and development of children. The state board of education and the state department of education might collaborate with the land grant university and its department of home economics (or human ecology) in helping parents understand the physical, mental, social, and emotional growth and development of their children. A land grant university has a mandate to provide "service" to the citizens of the state; assisting parents and educators in a cooperative way would be a fine example. Local board members may want to make such requests of state officials or ask their legislators to enact appropriate public policy (Randall, 1990b).

All Parents Must Have Information

Certainly the school, school district and state have a responsibility to see that *all* parents have access to consumer information. If only a few parents are able to make informed decisions, the promise of choice will not be realized, nor is it fair and equitable if all parents do not know they can make a choice or what those choices might be. For the market model of improving education to function it must be possible for parents of students to affirm the present programs in schools or make requests for changes. History indicates that parents with higher socioeconomic status know how to bring

about change in the school system. Therefore, it is crucial that low-income parents be given information, counseling, and guidance so that they realize they now have similar potential to influence the school or the system (Randall, 1989b).

Policy on Recruiting

Awareness of the difference between providing information to parents and recruiting students needs to be made. Board policies should reflect the district's stance on both. Certainly schools and districts need to give information to their clientele as well as to the general public. State law may be specific about providing consumer information so that parents can choose wisely and well (Randall, 1990b).

Recruiting of students is another matter. Ordinarily one thinks of promising a recruited student something such as a position on a team, a part in a play, or a chair in the orchestra. In Minnesota it is illegal to recruit students; it is desirable to provide information so that students and their parents can make informed choices (Randall, 1990b).

Diversity of Learning Environments

The third point of the triad, diversity of learning environments, follows after the first point, policy on choice, and the second point, consumer information. Diversity is provided by magnet schools, alternative schools, area learning centers, specialty schools, and the like. Diversity may also be provided by schools within a school or within classrooms (Randall, 1989b).

School site management, where decisions are made about the resources of dollars, people, space, and time by teachers, parents, students, and the principal have enormous potential for creating new learning environments. Board of education members have a new role when delegating these responsibilities to the school site.

Principals, teachers and parents know the children best of all and, working together, can create the optimum learning environment. The principals and teachers have knowledge and expertise about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, about human growth and development, and about interpersonal relations. With autonomy provided by the board of education and superintendent, the possibilities for diversity at the school site are enormous.

Boards may also set policy which would make every school in the district a magnet school. One school might specialize in mathematics and science, another might feature the humanities, a third, international education. Every school would offer the required courses for accreditation or, in the case of high schools, graduation credit, but their electives would be much more extensive in a given area. In Minnesota, the Cyrus Elementary School, located in a rural part of the state, became a science-mathematics-technology magnet.

The Public School Academy in Minneapolis changed instructional strategies. Teachers at the Academy have a class size of 14 to 1 by determining they would have no special teachers or support staff. Students get intensive help from their teachers.

Area Learning Centers, a collaborative learning environment, brings students together from several districts in Minnesota for an alternative education. Key to the success of the Area Learning Centers is the individualized instruction based on each student's needs. Staff have been extremely successful in helping each student develop his or her self-esteem as well as learn the required knowledge and skills.

Responsiveness to Constituents

Open enrollment was designed to improve education by using the market model. If parents and students choose certain programs or environments,

schools and districts need to be responsive. Board members, elected representatives of the people, know they must be responsive to their constituents (Randall, 1990b). Superintendents and principals want to provide the kind of education wanted in their community.

Summary

Choice is a powerful idea which will change the social system of education. Choice can extend opportunities, and bring about better achievement, better attitudes and a better education for every student.

Principals who accept their new role in implementing choice will be among the leaders in effecting change!

REFERENCES

Clymer, R., Hastings High School Principal, Hastings, Minnesota. Interview February 8, 1990, Hastings, MN.

Fiske, E. B. (1988, July 11). Parental choice in public school gains. New York Times, p. A1, B6.

Gendler, N. (Ed.). (1988). Schoolhouse Magazine, 5(1).

Kolderie, T. (1986, December). Personal notes of meetings of Governor's Discussion Group, St. Paul, MN.

Minnesota Department of Education. (1987). Choice! It's your move! (Available from Minnesota Department of Education, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101).

Minnesota Department of Education. (1988, December). How to select a school for your child: A family guide. (Available from Minnesota Department of Education, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101).

Minnesota Department of Education. (1989, September). Those great Minnesota schools: Educational options. (Available from Minnesota Department of Education, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101).

Minnesota Department of Education. (1990). Inscripcion en escuelas de distrito programma de opciones (inscripcion abierta). (Available from the Minnesota Department of Education, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101).

Nebraska Department of Education. (1990). Real choice for parents and children: The Nebraska options enrollment program. (Available from Nebraska Department of Education, 301 Centennial Mall South, Box 94987, Lincoln, NE 68509).

Randall, R. E. (1989, February 16). Testimony on educational choice before the hearing of the subcommittee on elementary, secondary, and vocational education, United States House of Representatives.

Randall, R. E. (1989). Guest commentary, choice: Implementation issues. Policy brief, a publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 3, 4-5.

Randall, R. E. (1990, Spring). Putting public school choice into perspective: A new paradigm. TC Educator, Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, pp. 1-3.

Randall, R. E. (1990, July-August). Educational choice: New roles for board members. Updating School Board Policies, Educational Polices Service of the National School Boards Association, 21(6), pp. 1-3.

The school book: A comprehensive guide to elementary schools in the twin cities. (1989). Minneapolis: Citizens League.

Schwartz, L., Middle School Principal, Hastings Public Schools, Hastings, Minnesota. Interview, February 8, 1990.

Sector, B. (1989, January 13). Minnesota public schools add 4th "R"--recruiting. Los Angles Times, pp. 1, 30.

South St. Paul Public Schools. (1989). Message to our Family and Friends. Minnesota: South St. Paul Public Schools Special School District No. 6, South St. Paul, MN.

WCCO TV. (1990). Parent power: Seeking the best education for your child. (Available from WCCO TV, 90 South 11th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55403).

Wedl, R. J., Deputy Commissioner of Education, Minnesota State Department of Education. Interview, February 9, 1990.

Weston, S. P., Nathan, J., & Raywid, M. A. (1989, May). Choosing a school for your child. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education.